



What is it?

Points To Remember About Osteoporosis

- Osteoporosis is a disease in which the bones become weak and are more likely to break.
- Osteoporosis is called the "silent disease" because bone loss does not have any symptoms until a bone breaks.
- Certain risk factors can cause bone loss and osteoporosis.
- Doctors use a bone mineral density test to check your bone health.
- Osteoporosis is treated with diet, exercise, lifestyle changes, and medicines.
- To help keep bones strong and slow down bone loss, eat a diet rich in calcium and vitamin D; exercise; and keep a healthy lifestyle.
- Take steps to prevent falls both inside and outside.

Osteoporosis is a disease in which your bones become weak and are more likely to break. If you have osteoporosis you are more likely to break bones in your hip, spine, and wrist.

Our bones are alive. Every day, our body breaks down old bone and puts new bone in its place. As we get older, our bones break down more bone than they put back. It is normal to lose some bone as we age. But, if we do not take steps to keep our bones healthy, we can lose too much bone and get osteoporosis.

Who gets it?

In the United States, millions of people either already have osteoporosis or are at high risk due to low bone mass. Osteoporosis can occur in both men and women and at any age, but it is most common in older women.

Because more women get osteoporosis than men, many men think they are not at risk for the disease. However, it is a real risk for older men and women from all backgrounds.

Also, people from certain ethnic backgrounds may be more likely to have other health problems that increase their risk for bone loss.

In addition, some diseases and medications can increase the risk of osteoporosis.

What are the symptoms?

Osteoporosis is called the "silent disease" because bone loss does not have any symptoms until a bone breaks.

What causes it?

Certain risk factors can cause bone loss and osteoporosis. Some of these things you cannot change and others you can.

Risk factors you cannot change include:

- Age. Your chances of getting osteoporosis increase as you get older.
- Ethnicity. White and Asian women are more likely to get osteoporosis. African American and Hispanic women have a lower chance of getting the disease.
- Family history. Osteoporosis tends to run in families. If a family member has osteoporosis or breaks a bone, there is a greater chance that you will too.
- Gender. You have a greater chance of getting osteoporosis if you are a woman. Women have smaller bones than men and lose bone faster than men because of hormone changes that happen after menopause.

Risk factors that you may be able to change include:

- Alcohol. Too much alcohol can cause bone loss and broken bones.
- Diet. Getting too little calcium and vitamin D can increase your chances of getting osteoporosis.
- Hormones. Low estrogen levels due to missing menstrual periods or to menopause can cause osteoporosis in women. Low testosterone levels can bring on osteoporosis in men.
- Medicines: Certain medicines can cause bone loss.
- Physical activity. Not exercising and not being active for long periods of time can increase your chances of getting osteoporosis. Like muscles, bones become stronger, and stay stronger, with regular exercise.
- Smoking. Cigarettes can keep your body from using the calcium in your diet. Also, women who smoke go through menopause earlier than those who don't smoke.
- Body weight. Being too thin makes you more likely to get osteoporosis.

Is there a test for it?

A bone mineral density test is the best way to check your bone health. This test can:

- Diagnose osteoporosis and tell you whether you are likely to break a bone.
- Check your bone strength.
- See if treatments are making your bones stronger.

How is it treated?

Treatment for osteoporosis includes:

- A balanced diet rich in calcium and vitamin D.
- An exercise plan.

- A healthy lifestyle.
- Medicines to help prevent and treat the disease.

Who treats it?

Doctors who treat osteoporosis may include:

- Family physicians.
- Internists.
- Endocrinologists.
- Geriatricians.
- Gynecologists.
- Orthopaedic surgeons.
- Rheumatologists.
- Physiatrists.

Living with it

Many of the things you do to prevent osteoporosis also help you to manage it. To help keep your bones strong and slow down bone loss, you can:

- Diet.
- Exercise.
- Healthy lifestyle.
- Preventing falls.

Diet

A healthy diet with enough calcium and vitamin D helps make your bones strong. Many people get less than half the calcium they need. Good sources of calcium are:

- Low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese.
- Foods with added calcium such as orange juice, cereals, and breads.

Vitamin D is also needed for strong bones. You may need to take vitamin D pills. The chart on this page shows the amount of calcium and vitamin D you should get each day.

Recommended Calcium and Vitamin D Intakes

| Life-stage group | Calcium mg/day | Vitamin D mcg/day |
|------------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Infants 0 to 6 months | 200 | 400 |
| Infants 6 to 12 months | 260 | 400 |
| 1 to 3 years old | 700 | 600 |

| Life-stage group | Calcium mg/day | Vitamin D IU/day |
|--|----------------|------------------|
| 4 to 8 years old | 1,000 | 600 |
| 9 to 13 years old | 1,300 | 600 |
| 14 to 18 years old | 1,300 | 600 |
| 19 to 30 years old | 1,000 | 600 |
| 31 to 50 years old | 1,000 | 600 |
| 51 to 70 years old males | 1,000 | 600 |
| 51 to 70 years old females | 1,200 | 600 |
| >70 years old | 1,200 | 800 |
| 14 to 18 years old, pregnant/lactating | 1,300 | 600 |
| 19 to 50 years old, pregnant/lactating | 1,000 | 600 |

Definitions: mg = milligrams; IU = International Units

Source: Food and Nutrition Board, Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences, 2010.

Exercise

Exercise helps your bones grow stronger. The best exercises for healthy bones are strength building and weight bearing, such as:

- Walking.
- Hiking.
- Jogging.
- Climbing stairs.
- Lifting weights.
- Playing tennis.
- Dancing.

Healthy Lifestyle

Smoking is bad for bones as well as the heart and lungs. Also, people who drink a lot of alcohol are more prone to bone loss and broken bones due to poor diet and risk of falling.

Preventing Falls

Men and women with osteoporosis need to take care not to fall down. Falls can break bones. Some reasons people fall are:

- Poor vision.
- Poor balance.
- Certain diseases that affect how you walk.
- Some types of medicine, such as sleeping pills.

Some tips to help prevent falls outdoors are:

- Use a cane or walker.
- Wear rubber-soled shoes so you don't slip.
- Walk on grass when sidewalks are slippery.
- In winter, put salt or kitty litter on icy sidewalks.

Some ways to help prevent falls indoors are:

- Keep rooms free of clutter, especially on floors.
- Use plastic or carpet runners on slippery floors.
- Wear low-heeled shoes that provide good support.
- Do not walk in socks, stockings, or slippers.
- Be sure carpets and area rugs have skid-proof backs or are tacked to the floor.
- Be sure stairs are well lit and have rails on both sides.
- Put grab bars on bathroom walls near tub, shower, and toilet.
- Use a rubber bath mat in the shower or tub.
- Keep a flashlight next to your bed.
- Use a sturdy step stool with a handrail and wide steps.
- Add more lights in rooms.
- Keep a cordless phone with you so that you don't have to rush to the phone when it rings and if you fall, you can call for help.

For More Info

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Toll free: 888-INFO-FDA (888-463-6332)

Website: <https://www.fda.gov>

[Drugs@FDA](https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf) at <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf> [Drugs@FDA](https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf) is a searchable catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics

Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

NIH Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases ~ National Resource Center

Website: <https://www.bones.nih.gov/>

National Institute on Aging

Website: <https://www.nia.nih.gov/>

American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

Website: <https://www.aaos.org>

American Society for Bone and Mineral Research

Website: <https://www.asbmr.org/Default.aspx>

National Osteoporosis Foundation

Website: <https://www.nof.org>

If you need more information about available resources in your language or other languages, please visit our webpages below or contact the NIAMS Information Clearinghouse at NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov.

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[Bone Health and Osteoporosis: A Guide for Asian Women Aged 50 and Older](#)

[Osteoporosis and Arthritis: Two Common but Different Conditions](#)

[Osteoporosis and Arthritis and How Are They Different, What Are?](#)